

# PAPERBACK INFERNO



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Volume 6 Number 1 -- a BSFA publication edited by Joseph Nicholas from his new address of 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, United Kingdom (publishers please note!). This issue contains reviews by...well, everyone omitted from the previous issue, plus as many other names as I can squeeze in (I've so much material on hand that it's getting embarrassing). The entire contents are copyright 1982 by The BSFA Ltd on behalf of the individual contributors, to whom all rights are hereby returned.

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## BLOOD ON THE RACKS -- Roy Macinski

If I was forced to find a single word to describe my response to the first two issues of Interzone and the first three of Extro, I think that word would be "indifference". Perhaps it's a little foolish to expect great things from either of these magazines whilst they are still in their formative periods, but there was very little in them which I found I could enthuse about. That's not to say that what they published was rubbish. Far from it -- much of the work was good, solid stuff. But that's unfortunately all it was; very few of the stories impressed or lingered in the memory.

Currently, everyone seems to be taking sides and pumping up their chosen magazine at the expense of the other. I guess that comparisons between the two are almost inevitable, but one only has to pick them up and casually flip through them to see that they are in fact two very different beasts, and that nearly all comparisons are completely erroneous. Interzone, with its choice of such writers as Ballard, Carter and Roberts together with its clean layout and "classic" typeface, is obviously aiming at what it perceives to be the "quality" end of the market; Extro, on the other hand, with its choice of such writers as Aldiss, Cowper and Shaw but more obviously in its style of production, is aiming for a much wider, more commercial audience. I don't view either one of these approaches as superior to the other, but merely two very different attempts to capture two very different parts of the same market -- a market that some would say ceased to exist long ago.

If that market does still exist and Interzone and Extro are to gain their respective shares of it, then for a number of reasons they face an uphill struggle. Of the two, Extro probably faces the bigger problems, for in basing its success or failure on a much wider audience than Interzone's it

must surmount the hurdles posed by both distribution and the casual reader. At the moment, Interzone's distribution (subscriptions and selected bookshops) seems to be working well, but Extro's (in London at least) seems to be all but nonexistent, thus not even giving the magazine a chance to survive, let alone flourish. Assuming that W. H. Smith and other wholesalers do pick it up, then it faces the problem of enticing the casual reader -- like it or not, many people do judge a book by its cover, and in this respect Extro are doing themselves no favours whatsoever. The covers have been eye-catching, but for all the wrong reasons. Indeed, I feel they'll do more to frighten off prospective first-time buyers than attract them.

As important as these factors may be, they are of course secondary to the problem of, once having established your readership, hanging on to it, and the solution to it is entirely dependant upon the quality of the stories you publish. As I implied at the beginning, there's certainly room for improvement; so now let's consider those stories.

One of the most notable aspects of both magazines has been how, with few exceptions, that "star" writers who have littered their pages have failed to shine. Packed into Interzone 1, for example, were Angela Carter, Keith Roberts, M. John Harrison, John Sladek and Michael Moorcock, yet with the possible exception of Sladek's "Guesting" -- as amusing little tale of what happens when an alien is lined up to appear on a nationwide American chat show -- there was very little that made a lasting impact on me. There can be no denying that in terms of style and technique the stories by Roberts and particularly those by Carter and Moorcock were superbly written, but they completely failed to involve me in their individual worlds. Indeed, whilst reading them I found myself continually sitting back and admiring the manner of their writing -- a sure sign that they had failed to engage my imagination.

The remaining story in that first issue was M. John Harrison's "The New Rays", centred on a particularly disturbing medical treatment involving the eponymous but mysterious new form of energy. Harrison tried, and to a certain extent succeeded, in providing an atmospheric tale, but in the end I was left with the feeling that it was merely fashionably dense, oblique and enigmatic.

Interzone 2 lacked the star-studded quality of its predecessor, but contained what was, for my moeny, the best story published in either: J. G. Ballard's "Memories Of The Space Age", dealing with the experiences of an ex-NASA official returning to Cape Kennedy after the first death in space, which has caused a disturbance in the flow of time that radically alters the individual's perception of it. Ballard's control and use of the English language is a wonder to behold: not once does he fall into the trap of overwriting. His imagination is powerfully conveyed, and the story is full of vivid and gripping imagery which glues the reader to the page.

Of the known writers published in the first three issues of Extro, the best stories were probably Bob Shaw's "Aliens Aren't Human" and Garry Kilworth's "Sumi Dreams Of A Paper Frog", and the worst was probably John Sladek's "Explanation For The Disappearance Of The Moon". The Kilworth was largely a stylistic exercise, but an interesting and very effective one, whereas the Shaw was a straightforward tale of the dangers of using force to resolve a dilemma and how, if you're not careful, it can backfire on you. It was up to the standard we've come to expect from Shaw, and it provided a diverting if somewhat undemanding read. Demanding and for me completely impenetrable was the Sladek story: obscure, frustrating and apparently without any point at all. I could not make head nor tail of it.

Other well-known writers published in the first three issues were Chris Priest, Ian Watson, Richard Cowper, James White and Brian Aldiss, with the stories by Priest, White and Aldiss being reprints. All were good, solid pieces but remain, at the last, fairly forgettable. Many of the stories from the new or newer writers fell into the same category, but a couple of them managed to shine. For me, the best was Steve Rasnic Tem's "War On The Downside", in Extro 3. This was a chilling tale of conflict in a region of space that causes people to undergo mental breakdowns; moreover, nobody seems to know whether the "enemy" really exists or whether the real enemy lies within. Otherwise, Jim Johnston's "The Return Of Ocean Stream", in

Extro 2, had a neat concept, to do with the flow of gravity, at its core, but the author never seemed to know what to do with it; just as an answer appeared forthcoming, the story ended. But it showed promise.... And, of the newer writers in Interzone, Rachel Pollack's "Angel Baby" (in the second issue) was a quite compelling if ultimately unresolved tale of obsession: had the first-person female narrator been impregnated by an alien, or was she merely imagining it all?

So there you have it. I would have like to have been more positive in this review because I feel that these two magazines need our support and encouragement if they are to flourish; but, at present, all we can support is the concept of the magazines themselves. Better and more involving fiction is required if they are to establish themselves as an integral part of British SF -- certainly, when the BSFA Awards next come around, I would like to see a British writer from a British magazine collect the prize in the short story section, but at the moment they lack the impact to do so.

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Jessica Amanda Salmonson -- THE GOLDEN NAGINATA (Ace, 310pp, \$2.75)

Reviewed by Chris Bailey

Parallel world stories have obvious attractions for all concerned: the writer can work out a pet obsession without worrying over strict historical verisimilitude, while the reader is reassured by finding his feet on relatively familiar ground. Jessica Amanda Salmonson's baby is shogunate Japan and the parallel world device allows her to get away with a lot that James Clavell couldn't, for besides impossibly valorous samurai her Naipon is crawling with oni, tengu, kirin and other nasties out of Japanese legend. She writes adequately, but uninspiringly, and her tendency to clipped syntax emphasises her blistering progress through a convoluted plot. I was left breathless, but unconvinced. The spirit of the samurai is there, no doubt, but what of the spirit of Hokushai or Basho? Surely even the bloodthirstiest samurai had the occasional day off? The dialogue is all threats and boasts, the descriptions are all of weapons, clothes and battle-gear. Although once or twice people do sit down and gawp at the moon, maybe dashing off an awful haiku at the same time, they do so rather in the manner of a boxer's rest between rounds, before the carnage is resumed. "The heads of these arrows were shaped like big turnips which could annihilate a man's eye then burst out the back of a skull, brains splattering in the wake." The heroine, Tomoe Gozen, finds her every quest resulting in obligations to go and avenge another ghost or do in another miscreant spirit, and so the novel goes on, leaving behind it a trail of spilled viscera; the reader is despairing of the book ever ending when, quite suddenly, it does, and it almost redeems itself at the same time, for Tomoe reflects well upon her vanity and upon the validity of the Way. But then she's confronted by an old foe and as a result of this encounter ("his throat burred a sickening froth") she merely resolves to become a sincerer swordsperson.

The author comes over as a keen feminist, but having her heroine butcher every male who crosses her path may be a somewhat simplistic method of settling old scores. The Golden Naginata is the second book in a trilogy and it carries within it an endorsement of the first (Tomoe Gozen) from Fighting Women's News; which fact somehow seems to sum up the present instalment pretty well.

Philip Jose Farmer -- NIGHT OF LIGHT (Penguin, 176pp, £1.25)

Reviewed by Ann Collier

The plot of this novel is so convoluted as to defy resume. It concerns John Carmody, a wife-murdering psychopath undergoing a conversion to Christianity after witnessing supernatural events on an alien planet, events which include his conjuring a physical projection of his dismembered wife, who then instantly bears a child who is the son and successor to the native god Yess, who is himself threatened with death by fundamentalist Christians.... Suffice it to say, this is an eventful book. The first half deals with the preliminary rituals of the Night of Life, during which electromagnetic storms on the sun cause great upheaval to the inhabitants of Dante's Joy. "Monsters from the id" are embodied and roam the streets with people whose

bodies are ravaged by diseases which are physical manifestations of psychic states. Carmody is clearly a bad guy, enjoying the sexual rituals that form part of the religious response to the Night but mocking other aspects of the religion and harbouring thoughts of murder which are realised when he meets, in a perfectly mundane encounter, the god Yess. In a very confused narrative, Farmer has him fathering Yess's successor, a process which causes him to experience a dramatic conversion to Christianity. Twenty-seven years later, he returns to Dante's Joy to dissuade this son from compelling all its inhabitants to stay awake and so undergo the full experience of the Night. The emphasis on the alien religion, Boontism, which was much in evidence earlier in the book, gives way, in the second half, to a thriller dotted with Christiesque red herrings. To expose Yess's non-divinity, fundamentalist Christians conspire to kill him. As a further complication, grudge-bearing ex-accomplices from Carmody's past plot to kill him in revenge. Farmer seems engrossed in inviting us to guess the identity of these conspirators until the last few pages, when theological questions again predominate.

It is difficult to fathom Farmer's intentions in this messy book. His portrayal of Carmody as a vicious, sadistic murderer is just about credible; Carmody's conversion to a good, decent, though rather bland Christian priest is not. Equally unsatisfactory is the treatment of Boontism, of which few details are given beyond reference to its origins and incidental mention of various items used during its ceremonies. Farmer deal very fleetingly with the crucial interplay between religious belief in undergoing the Night and the physical effects of the electromagnetic activity, and (scanning the text to find the vital connections) I was left with a feeling of frustration and irritation only to discover, on a second reading, that the information simply is not there. The novel is meant to work through merely the suggestion of religious paraphernalia and through striking gory images whose power to induce shock sidetracks the intellect from noting the deficiencies. However, the final thought with which Farmer leaves us is Carmody's questioning of whether Boontism or Christianity is the true religion, an intellectual hurdle the brain refuses having been given insufficient momentum on the run-up. Splendidly bold and imaginative though the descriptions of the supernatural events are, they fail to carry along this pretentious, confused and irritating book.

Frederik Pohl -- PLANETS THREE (Bantam, 225pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

"It is hard for me to know how to rate 'Figurehead', 'Donovan Had A Dream' and 'Red Moon Of Danger' at this late date" states Pohl in his introduction, adding that he'll leave the verdict up to us. I'd have thought that the verdict was obvious, for what else can you truthfully say of three space opera novelettes published in the obscurer pulps of the late forties except that they are, simply, dreadful? It's useless to point to them, as the blurb attempts, as crucial to the development of modern SF because if they were they would have been reprinted many times before now -- and if they really are that crucial, then God alone knows how we ever got where we are today. The fact is that a bad story is a bad story regardless of how or when it was written, and the resurrection of these three, which should have been left to moulder in decent obscurity, is yet more evidence for the sort of crass commercialism ("It's by a big name author, so of course it will sell") that's now taken over SF publishing. Avoid this book like the plague.

Glen Cook -- SHADOWLINE (Warner, 350pp, \$2.75)

Reviewed by Dorothy Davies

This is the story of Gneaus Storm, a mercenary controlling a vast empire and conducting a running battle with Richard Hawksblood, also a mercenary. In his home, Storm keeps two mutant alsatians and the ravenshrikes, the nocturnal flying lizards of the Broken Wing Swamp. They have limited psi powers.

Norborn w'Deeth, a Sangarse, is forced to flee for his life from his home world of Prefactlas when a raid by Storm kills most of his family. He

becomes a slave, but obtains his freedom when he meets up with Rhafu, a member of his household who also escaped. Together, they plan Deeth's return as the head of the Norborn family and his revenge on those who killed his world; to do this, he becomes involved with Michael Dee, Storm's bastard brother.

On Blackworld there is the Shadowline, which divides Brightside and Teilight. Frog is a tractor hog, spending his time running the gauntlet of Brightside for the small living Twilight can give him. He has an adopted daughter, Moira, his only concession to the normal feelings of life. He believes there is infinite wealth to be had, should he and could he once reach the end of the Shadowline before his oxygen and his heat protection give out. He makes it, but the effort almost costs him his life. In hospital, he is visited by Michael Dee, posing as a reporter, who prises the secret of Shadowline from him and then kills him. Moira knows who committed the murder, vows her revenge with the aid of one of Frog's associates, changes her name to Pollyanna and proceeds to seduce and marry one of Storm's sons in order to get closer to Michael Dee.

There are strange people in this book: Storm's offspring, Lucifer, blind Homer, Benjamin; his twin Masato, or Mouse, whose commentary is supposed to link the chapters together (these, incidentally, are often as short as six lines). There are the Darksworlds, Wulf and Helmut, holding the Storm empire together, and Dee's strange hangers-on. The book leaps from world to world, in singleships and starships, not to mention fleeting references to harvestships manned by the High Seiners, the Starfishers who give their name to the trilogy of which this is the first book and who have, in fact, very little to do with it at all. There are cruel and intricate tortures, cryo-cyborg technology and resurrected dead, and (of course) "the death-without-resurrection".

By the end, I was completely confused as to whether Cook was writing a sword-and-sorcery novel (Hawksblood, Darksworld, Broken Wing Swamp, etc.) or a police thriller ("Andiron, Andiron, this is Blackwood, receiving light projectile fire, have silenced one lascannon. Over."), or whether he was really a western writer who had decided to jump genres (in the middle of a pitched battle with laser rifles, Strom produces a .45 pistol and we have the classically bad line "Storm's pistol spoke"). If you add to this writing of such style as "A gleeful wild devil spun circles of terror around the hall" and "They had pallid skin and stringy brown hair so sparse it belonged on an endangered species list" coupled with Cook's intention to make a verb of the word "serendipity" by twice using it as "serendipitous" you will have some idea of what the second and third volumes of "The Starfishers Trilogy" will contain.

James Gunn -- THE MIND MASTER (Timescape, 174pp, \$2.25)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

"We have tamed the savage land, he thought, and the savages within us. We have humanized the earth, but everywhere we have cut ourselves off from those direct experiences with life that made us human: hunger, disease, pain, loss, and even death itself, which seldom comes unbidden." (p.134)

Once a society has become so completely automated that there is no need for people to do any form of work, or even go outside (they live in self-contained, windowless apartments), there is a danger that they will become inward-looking. They will forsake reality for dreams. That, at least, is James Gunn's contention in this odd book (not a novel, not a fix-up; possibly a linked collection of three novelettes) which used to bear the more appropriate but less startling title The Dreamers.

Children are brought up in automated creches. People spend their lives sampling the dreams of others (done by swallowing capsules!) until they become tired of life. Then they either plug into a particular dream full-time or else opt for a kind of suspended animation. A few individuals perform more creative tasks (of which the computers are incapable), such as creative dreaming -- making the master tapes from which the capsules are prepared. There are also some old instructive capsules available should anyone want to perform useful skilled work. (Brain surgery as a hobby, anyone?)

It all seems a rather pointless existence, though the most surprising

thing about it is that Gunn sets it in the 22nd century. It is a kind of stasis, of course, because there is no progress of any kind (though it is a stasis which one feels might have existed for millenia). To the contrary, all systems seem to be gradually running down.

The three stories about these dreamers are insubstantial and incomplete. They all involve men who are betrayed, or believe themselves betrayed, by women. The best of them shows one of the creative dreamers preparing a dream tape of a Trojan War (not quite the Trojan War) but becoming ensnared by the dream and particularly by Helen of Troy.

But the whole book is rather half-hearted and insubstantial, failing to do justice to its concept, with the linking passages hindering rather than helping.

Michael De Larrabeiti -- THE BORRIBLES GO FOR BROKE (Ace, 215pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Kevin Rattan

Of course, I didn't really believe Joseph when he told me in his covering letter that this is labelled as SF because the Borribles have pointed ears. I mean, I know that the ways of publishers are beyond all understanding, but that sounded just too far-fetched. It is also, of course, completely true -- although, while it isn't SF, it is most definitely fantasy.

The Borribles of the title have the aforementioned pointed ears, these having grown since they ran away to become permanent juvenile delinquents. They fear having these ears clipped because this would return them to the status of ordinary children, from which they have developed. Like evil Peter Pans, they do not grow up or grow old, though they can be, and are, killed. Their favourite weapon is the catapult; they are unwashed, steal, dislike authority and swear. For parents, Borrible equals Horrible, but for children they are the ultimate wish-fulfillment.

The morals of this book, which avoids the moralising traditional in children's books of how-good-little-boys-and-girls-should-behave, emphasise individualism and attacks materialist values. That may sound dry for children, but I assure you that it is not. The emphasis on individuality is symbolised by the struggle of the Borribles against the SBG (Special Borrible Group), in the person of the ridiculous but sinister Inspector Sussworth and of his henchman Sergeant Hanks, and against the far less conical Wendle clan who are Borribles gone wrong, and have submitted to a particularly restrictive authority under "Flinthead". The attack on materialism is embodied in the way of life of the Borribles, who do not use money, and of their quest which only comes about because of a previous quest which wrongly went after money.

This quest is one of the major fantasy elements of the book, but others concern such things as the Borribles having to earn their names and delighting in telling the story of how they won them. Another is that each of the groups or characters has their own song; they are a positive delight and I cannot resist quoting. The Borribles in general sing that they are "Ragged arsed renegades, never respectable/Under your noses but rarely detectable/Freedom's a Borrible's one occupation!" The SBG sing: "Authority must always win/Dissenters are a mortal blight/I'll straighten them with discipline/Teach them to put their morals right!" The Wendles sing: "We're rough and we're tough and we don't give damn/We are the elite of the Borrible clan."

The quest involves, in the natural way of things, quite a large amount of violence and dirt, and here are yet more reasons for kids to love it and adults to hate it. The violence is mostly offstage, such as the delightful tales of people being drowned in mud, but is at times graphic and grisly. Larrabeiti positively revels in it, though this may mean that he knows his audience very well. Much of the action takes place in the sewers, and there is no major character who is not covered in shit at one time or another. Sergeant Hanks is constantly picking his nose, and we are always told what he does with the snot.

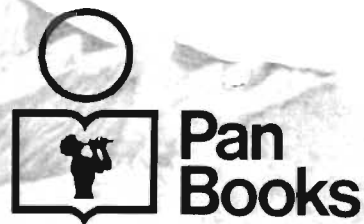
I don't think I've ever read a book like this before. It's for children, but does not write down to them. The story so carries you away that you forget that there is no SBG and no one knows about any Borribles. It's the ultimate answer to "nice" kids' books; buy it and read it yourself!

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## ADVERTISING SCHEDULE


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Page	VECTOR magazine	
Page	FOUNDATION magazine	
½ page	AD ASTRA magazine	
Page	DARK HORIZONS magazine	


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 Pan Books



Warren Norwood -- THE WINDHOVER TALES: AN IMAGE OF VOICES (Bantam, 210pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

To start with, you have to realise that this isn't just a book, it's "a new science fiction adventure series". To prove it, Bantam have helpfully included an extract from volume 2 in the back of volume 1; it's called Flexing The Warp and is due out in early 1983. Norwood is currently working on volume 3 of the series, entitled Fize Of The Gabriel Ratchets. He works for Bantam and lives in Texas. This one will run and run.

The plot: Contract diplomat Gerard Manley in his starship Windhover roves the universe, righting wrongs and writing treaties for alien races joining the mighty Federation. He doesn't say which Federation. The only problem is that he has recently completed a mission to the Ribble galaxy, and the Federation has wiped his mind of the entire experience. But he has recurrent dreams of a mysterious and beautiful woman called Fairy Peg, ruler of the Ribble galaxy, and he has half an idea that he used to be her consort. The saga of a man in search of himself, right? He used to be Fize of the Gabriel Ratchets, too (hence the title of volume 3), but he can't really remember what the Grabriel Ratchets do, or what a Fize is.

Anyway, he falls in love with a researcher called ShRil, a Sylvan. Sylvans have three breasts and wear "teat patches" and are very sexy. She's researching into "universal mythology", and together she and Gerard discover a new universal legend about a character called Tenderfoot. As we follow Gerard through various thrilling missions, he discovers more and more about Tenderfoot in previously unrecorded alien poetry. I won't sicken you with a sample. There seems to be some mysterious connection between Gerard and Tenderfoot. After an abortive attempt to meet Fairy Peg, Gerard marries ShRil and gives up diplomacy for full-time mythology. End of volume 1.

I think it's one of those books that are supposed to have some deep and cosmic significance. I couldn't work out what it was. I find this kind of literary pretension rather embarrassing, and I'm just faintly suspicious of Anne McGaffrey's cover blurb -- "Twelve years ago, when I finished reading Stanislaw Lem's Polaris, I was similarly awed," she says, but obviously wasn't awed enough to remember the title of Solaris correctly.

I trust that makes the situation clear to those of you who like this sort of thing. I wouldn't go so far as to tell anyone not to buy it, but I'd advise reading it first. There are plenty of more worthwhile novels around.

Brian Aldiss -- THE MALACIA TAPESTRY and SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL (Granada, 293pp and 190pp respectively, £1.25 each)

Reviewed by Brian Smith

Perfection is an elusive quality in the world of literature. Human fallibility and long, bitter experience tell us that all novels have a flaw of some kind somewhere -- but if The Malacia Tapestry has one then I'm damned if I can find it. I have read only a handful of SF novels which I regard as being true works of art, and this is one of them.

The setting is the city-state of Malacia, a Venice enjoying an eternal Renaissance in an alternate universe whose history and geography is at once both strange (the humans are descended from dinosaurs) and yet familiar (the world beyond Malacia contains Sweden, Turkey and Byzantium), so that Malacia hovers dream-like between myth and reality. The city is a major strand in Aldiss's tapestry, a vibrant, triumphantly real metropolis overflowing with life, love and intrigue. It forms a stage upon which the characters move, players in both a literal and a literary sense. Foremost among them is Perian de Chirolo, dilettante actor and dissolute lecher. On one level, the story is of his ambitious affair with the daughter of a noble family, during the course of which he shows signs of being truly in love for the first time by offering the ultimate sacrifice of attempting to change his own nature. On a deeper level, it is a detailed analysis of the relationship between art and reality and the paradoxes involved therein; how the best art is that which reflects life, and how life can at times seem very bad art indeed. The book is full of examples, from puppet shows and shadow plays to the immortalisation of street urchins on perfect glass miniatures, but the paradox

is best crystallised in the dreadfully hackneyed play in which Perian finds himself acting, the plot of which oozes from his script into his life.

As Perian's affair carries him into ever more elevated strata of Malacian society (and very deep political waters indeed), so more themes, not inconsequential in themselves, interweave with the main two. The nature of the revolutionary, the morality of privilege and the insidious guises into which totalitarianism can twist itself, to name but three. With so many ideas at work, it is hardly surprising that the plot is not linear, but instead forms an intricate gavotte, in which the characters interact with each other and their society in formal, stately measures. The story, in fact, resembles an exquisite piece of jewellery, with the themes and ideas embedded in a luxuriant style like gemstones in gold. (It is perhaps Aldiss's greatest achievement that the novel itself should be representative of its own main metaphor.) Aldiss's prose is superb throughout, displaying a perceptive sense of humour and a deep joy of language which has never heard of self-indulgence. He has a magnificent gift for sketching in vivid colours the sights and sounds of the city street, hillsides in the sun or forests in the darkness, for capturing long golden afternoons lost in time. I can think of no one to stand beside him in this respect except E. R. Eddison, although he is not prone to the occasional purple excesses which flawed Eddison's work. (The comparison with Eddison is made closer by the frequent philosophical exchanges between the characters and the strange, evocative Tiepolo illustrations which stud the book.)

The world of Malacia is a vaulting feat of imagination, thoroughly consistent in its politics, society and economy and peopled by a host of marvelously drawn characters; rich, poor, humble, arrogant and irrepressible. They and their world live on for the reader after the book has been closed, in the same way that a room does not cease to exist when the light has been turned out. The Malacia Tapestry is a beautiful, rich and above all important novel. If your pocket won't stretch to the hardback asking price of Helliconia Spring, buy this instead and see what all the fuss is about.

Space, Time And Nathaniel was Aldiss's first collection (indeed, his first SF book), and is by now a hardy perennial. Twenty-five years old and veteran of many reprints, as is witnessed by the three different introductions it now carries, two of them from earlier editions. Collected here are fourteen of Aldiss's early short stories, from the period 1954-57. They have much in common: they are all neat, clever little stories written in a largely undemonstrative prose. Taken en masse, they are also rather depressing: so many sticky ends have been assembled that, were Aldiss's name to be removed from the book, you might well take this to be an Ellison collection. The characters in these stories find themselves up against a universe which is at best insouciant and at worst openly malevolent. One by one, they fall victim to forces far beyond their control, and often beyond their understanding, at times in a disturbingly surreal fashion. But the stories do display remarkable confidence and inventiveness for their time, and are not without their lessons for us today. In a world where the video recorder vies with the home computer for the honour of being the leading status symbol of the Western world, it is a mark of Aldiss's sanity as a writer that his very first story, "Criminal Record", contains the following passage:

"Harry stared blankly out of the window and whispered to himself: 'A television recording!' Then he said: 'Seems a funny thing to want to have.'

"'It comes from a funny civilisation,' I answered.  
There's no answer to that.

Robert Silverberg, Charles Waugh & Harry Greenberg (eds.) -- THE SCIENCE  
FICTIONAL DINOSAUR (Avon/Flare, 224pp, \$2.25)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

Whether you're interested in SF stories or in dinosaurs, you're likely to find this collection disappointing: its only achievement is as an awful example of how SF -- so vaunted as a "literature of ideas" -- plunders the most exciting discoveries of science and reduces them to mere hooks from which to suspend ancient and hackneyed plots, analogous to the manner in which the protagonist of Brian Aldiss's excellent "Poor Little Warrior!" converts the

monstrously awe-inspiring brontosaurus into a heap of carrion. The rest of the book consists of mercifully brief introductions to the stories, one or two gratuitous and pedantic footnotes (for instance: an explanation of the proper, as distinct from popular, use of the term "brontosaurus" tacked on to the Aldiss story), an uninformative two-page introduction to the collection, four pages of "Geologic Time-Scale", seven of "Glossary Of Selected Mesozoic Fauna" (do the editors think we're going to look up every technical term that interrupts the terrific flow of the stories?), a two-and-a-bit page "Classification Of Selected Mesozoic Reptiles", a list of "Further Reading" of fiction about dinosaurs, and nine stories, of which only the Aldiss scrap mentioned above draws praise. Robert Silverberg's "Our Lady Of The Sauro-pods" is the best of the also-rans: though competent, Silverberg's writing lacks the power to transcend the vapidly implausible story-line -- no heavy-hoofed note points it out, but skiffy readers can be assumed as perfectly familiar with the far-fetched axioms of pseudo-science, there's no evidence for the existence of telepathy in humans; and even if, against all probability, all dinosaur species of whatever period were able to unite in one telepathic web, it's ridiculous to suggest that a human would be able to tune in on the broadcast.

So much for faint praise: the rest is drivel. Here's the rundown. Robert F. Young's "When Time Was New", despite faint touches of Babes In The Wood and Children Of The New Forest, boils down to a slushy Mills & Boon romance rendered ridiculous by the time-travel twist -- shall I sicken you by explaining how the modern hero, on a trip back to the Cretaceous, rescues two cute kids kidnapped from Mars not only from the dinosaurs but from the baddies of their own world, that the girl-child falls in love with him, comes forward into his own time and turns out to be the remote and glamorous assistant with whom he has been in love all along. It could only work as a farce; unfortunately, it's narrated with all the earnest mediocrity of the real Mills & Boon. Or there's Paul Ash's "Wings Of A Bat", a "helpful animal" story about a baby pteranodon, saved by humans transported back in time, that in its turn saves them. Or Harry Harrison's "The Ever-Branching Tree", a fictionalised school-lesson the bald didacticism of which, now that palaeontology has decided that dinosaurs were probably warm-blooded, no longer conveys any useful information and has thus entirely lost any point it once had. Two anecdotes by Asimov, "Day Of The Hunters" and "A Statue For Father", build up economically to their gimmicks, likewise Poul Anderson's "Wildcat" -- "A Statue For Father" is a twist of Cordwainer Smith's "From Gustible's Planet", without Smith's quality of writing and substituting time-travel for interplanetary contact; the other two stories are portentous warnings about how we're setting ourselves up for extinction, but neither sheds any fresh light on the problem nor proposes any workable solution. The last story, "Hermes To The Ages" by Frederick D. Gottlieb, is a well-intentioned but pedestrian account of how US and Russian scientists in space co-operate to revive a dried-up dinosaur they've found on the Moon.

Rather than waste time or money on this contemptible volume, you should -- if you're interested in stories about dinosaurs which do actually convey information about the current state of knowledge in their study -- try William Stout's The Dinosaurs (reviewed by Joseph Nicholas in Vector 105), which is better written, both more interesting and more instructive, and contains plenty of pictures for good measure.

John Sladek -- RODERICK (Granada, 348pp, £1.95; Timescape, 256pp, \$2.75)  
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

First published in hardback in late 1980 (which fact alone ensured its being overlooked for every major award of 1981), this is the first volume of a two-part novel about, as the subtitle has it, "The Education Of A Young Machine". (Two parts in the UK, anyway; in the USA, it has been split into three, with the first concluding at the end of chapter 17.) As such, it's an engrossing absurdist comedy of a highly inventive order -- Roderick begins life at a hick, backwoods university as an Artificial Intelligence computer program funded by a NASA grant which turns out to be a rip-off set up by a junior executive who wants the money to buy himself a collection of World War 2 fighter planes; NASA internal audit eventually closes him down and the uni-

verisyt declines to continue funding the project on its own, so Roderick -- self-aware and capable of learning, but otherwise ignorant of the world and lacking in wisdom -- is transferred into a tracked, cylindrical body and smuggled out by one of his creators (who's convinced that the reason no one ever gets anywhere with an AI project is because some secret agency always closes it down and rubs out its participants at the moment of breakthrough) to take up residence with a gadget-crazy ecologist who, when his wife runs off with another man.... Well, one could go on summarising the plot almost ad infinitum, but if I tell you that, among other things, he's kidnapped by gypsies, forced into telling fortunes at a carnival, adopted by an elderly couple, beaten up in the school playground, and given to conducting long arguments with his priest about the necessity of God, you'll no doubt get some idea of the range of his adventures. Not to mention their unlikelihood -- how, after all, could almost everyone he meets mistake him for a severely handicapped child rather than recognise him as a robot and, when he protests that he is, spend so much time trying to dissuade him? It's a tribute to Sladek's genius that you don't really begin to quibble until after you've finished reading, but even then it isn't implausible at all because a good part of the novel concerns the ways in which we human beings, for all our supposed adaptability and flexibility, are just as programmed as any machine, conditioned to think and behave in particular patterns, blind to anything beyond our narrow perceptions and experiences. Hence the somewhat two-dimensional nature of the characters: a wonderfully diverse, entertaining and downright crazy bunch they are, but at the last never more than caricatures of the types of Midwest Americans amongst whom Sladek, himself a Midwesterner, must have grown up (which prompts the question: how many of Roderick's childhood experiences are analogous to his own?). My only serious quibble concerns the real nature of Roderick's adopted parents, disclosed towards the end of the UK edition, which (even within the context of the novel as a whole) simply strains credulity too far for it to be recovered. Which is a pity, because it does somewhat mar what has, up until then, been a most excellent and enjoyable work; but I'm nevertheless looking forward to the second part, Roderick At Random, with eager anticipation.

Frederick Pohl -- BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON (Futura, 327pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Ray Owen

The most immediately striking thing about this novel is the hideous cover: a young, almost naked woman held captive by a machine, in the worst tradition of the old pulp magazines. However, whereas the majority of the paintings in those days (by such artists as Earl K. Bergey and Frank R. Paul) had a comic-like simplicity which made them acceptable, the (uncredited) creator of this cover has a rather more graphic and detailed style which only serves to make it cheaper and more tasteless.

But it is true that the cover suits the contents of the novel, for both are largely simple updates of the old "sense of wonder" stories that abounded in the early days of the magazines. In this sequel to Gateway, Pohl presents mankind with further wondrous remnants of the mysterious vanished alien race, the Heechee. The discovery of a vast "food factory" amongst the asteroids promotes a mission to explore the possibilities of using it for Earth's hungry millions, which in turn lead us to the slightly more vast Heechee Heaven, where failed experiments in genetic engineering are left to vegetate under the occasional supervision of a tired semi-machine (who is only relatively vast). The plot then gets involved in the theory that the Heechee were (or possibly still are) busily arranging a re-run of the Big Bang in order to change fundamental mathematics. And just in case we were growing complacent about the bigness of things (difficult as this is after a chapter entitled "Sixty Billion Gigabits"), at the end we really meet the Heechee, and the place where they live is very very very vast indeed. The book ends on a corny and unoriginal twist. I only hope there won't be a sequel.

As simple, rather unchallenging escapism, Beyond The Blue Event Horizon could be seen as a success. But, compared with the old, carefully crafted and occasionally funny works that Pohl has produced, it is a disappointment -- and, fundamentally, a retrograde step for him.

Robert Sheckley -- THE ROBOT WHO LOOKED LIKE ME (Bantam, 180pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Pascal Thomas

The writer who looks like Robert Sheckley...is the Sheckley of the 70s, presented here through various stories from the pages of Galaxy, Playboy and various anthologies. I liked the older version better; Sheckley is often re-reading old ground here, and not surprisingly does not sound as good as he did the first time around. By and large, glibness has replaced wit, and where the 1950s' Sheckley would deliver a punchline today's writer underlines with lengthy comments an ending that has usually become clear halfway through the story.

He still manages to be funny, though! "Slaves Of Time" may not rise to the level of the older "Me, Myself And I", but it is a good satire of the Do Something About It reflex, and the title story amused me (once its romantic blather had been forgotten). There is a good idea behind "The Standard Nightmare": those who defend democracy are those most likely to suppress it (namely, the military). Alas, it goes downhill from there, and most of the collection is not worth much more than, say, average Ron Goulart. The best of the whole lot is probably the (curiously uncredited here) collaboration with Harlan Ellison, "I See A Man Sitting On A Chair, And The Chair Is Biting His Leg", and that dates back to the 60s anyway.

Norman Spinrad -- SONGS FROM THE STARS (Arrow, 275pp, \$1.60)

Reviewed by John Hobson

This is an ambitious attempt to tackle the perennial question of the morality of further space exploration from a Hip West Coast American stance. Spinrad is in favour of such exploration, but mindful that his audience are muesli capitalists sceptical of such a blatant (mis)use of the Earth's resources, he has set his story in a future in which the planet has nuked itself and a Woodstock-based society has evolved.

Aquaria is the last remaining piece of radiation-free America, and is dedicated to the use of "white" science, the laws of muscle, sun, wind and water, branding all the others as "black". Beyond the hills, a band of recalcitrant "black" scientists continue to manufacture and trade in the old sciences, and to keep them in check Clear Blue Lou, the leader of Aquaria, dispenses justice in an effort to delineate the boundaries between "white" and "black". He is summoned to the main trading post, La Mirage, to judge Sunshine Sue, who has been setting up a radio network to spread news and information and who has bought "black" radios containing radioactive elements. Sue is a lure, because she has been in constant contact with Harker, the leader of the "black" scientists, who wishes Lou to give a sort of blessing to their projects. This he does, which enables Harker to reveal that the "black" scientists have been preparing a space flight to an orbiting station which had succeeded in contacting an alien race before the bombs fell. The story thereafter follows predictable lines, ending with contact with the aliens being restored.

Spinrad is one of the most inconsistent writers of recent years, and in this book the pedestrian and strictly linear plot reveal him to be in poor form. His style is an acquired taste, suffering from an overabundance of foul language sprinkled with a heavy-handed hippy jargon:

"Lou, however, got off behind being a pure sexual organism in bed, whose consciousness was totally involved in the act of making love itself, not in the mind games that drove it. As far as he was concerned, the ideal fuck was like a flash of sartori, where a verbal thought dissolved into a oneness with a timeless ecstatic moment."

Lou and Sue are mere cyphers of goodness, and while Harker starts out as an amoral scientist with all the right answers, by the end he has been transformed into a spinless jelly, a transformation which is unconvincing.

But the author of The Iron Dream cannot be dismissed as a mere hack, and it is through its underlying theme that Songs From The Stars partially redeems itself. Spinrad interweaves "black" science so thoroughly with "white" that the hypocrisy of Clear Blue Lou's attempt to stem the advance of the former becomes ever more obvious as the novel proceeds, a direct analogy to the present, where our fossil-fuel-using society allows people time to criticise the hand that feeds it. Aquaria is a combination of wattle huts and mains elec-

tricity, both independent rather than incompatible. Spinrad is also aware that science has brought more harm than good and, when they regain contact with the aliens, Harker wishes to draw a veil of secrecy over the information they receive while Lou and Sue want complete freedom of access -- in other words, science and its practitioners should be answerable for its actions.

Yet the most illuminating aspect of the book is only briefly touched upon. On entering the space station, the protagonists find a perfectly preserved string of corpses:

"They would have had to tie themselves together, cycled the air out of the airlock and then calmly taken poison,' Harker croaked, 'just to preserve their bodies for us to find.'"

The space station is spiritually a pyramid, a reminder for the future of those who have lived in the past. Behind all man's endeavours, both individually and collectively, is a desire for self-perpetuation, immortality; only by reaching the stars can we ensure that the universe is aware of our existence. Sadly, Spinrad fails to develop this theme sufficiently. Thematically strong, Songs From The Stars never recovers from the handicap of its style and plotting; but it is of more than passing interest, and a hopeful sign for the future.

Mike Ashley (ed.) -- THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION LISTS (Virgin, 190pp, £2.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Those of you who read Dave Langford's Ansible (and you all do, don't you?) will know that Virgin's original book of SF lists died when Maxim Jakubowski left them but has since been resold to Berkley in the USA; this one was obviously brought in to fill the gap, and looks it. A rush job in every way, it is not so much a collection of definitive lists as a compilation of some of the lists that Mike Ashley has happened to draw up throughout his years as a fan, buttressed by others cobbled together to make up the bulk; and a pretty rosey lot they are too, evidencing nothing so much as an omnivorous lack of discrimination and a predilection for including the notes of friends rather than those who might actually know something about their subjects. Thus we have no less than five separate lists from Forrest J. Ackerman, whom Ashley fulsomely notes is SF's "Number One Fan and Number One Personality.... there is no one more closely at the core of science fiction", which hasn't been the case since at least the late forties; Hal Clement's list of the ten SF novels he's most re-read, which is of no use to anyone (and whose content shows him up as a retarded adolescent to boot); a list by someone called Mary Elizabeth Counselman (who?) of her ten favourite weird tales; Larry Miven's list of nine ideas which are now impossible to use, in which he is allowed to get away with two utterly irrelevant and blatantly self-promoting adverts for his own books (what is it about the egos of these well-heeled American writers, that they can delude themselves into thinking that their tawdry and ill-written rubbish is the height of literary endeavour?); a list of SF authors born in each year of this century, in which 1936 is given over to one S. J. Treibich ("Who's he?" "A friend of Laurence Janifer's." "Who's he?" "A friend of Ashley's."); a list of some of the first fictional space voyages rather than the first; a list of five "interesting" (!) novels about computers, which appears to be composed of the first five that came to Ashley's mind; a list of twenty SF themes and their first appearances, which used the Moskowitziian principle of infinite regression and assumes that a theme's first appearance, no matter how obscure or forgotten, is its most important and influential; and so on. To add to the pain, the copy-editing throughout is incompetent butchery, with headings transposed, paragraphs cut short or repeated elsewhere, names misspelled....it is rubbish, a total waste of time and energy, and I look forward to Jakubowski's book in the confident expectation that it will sweep Ashley's aside as though it had never existed.

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Almost the end, then. On hand for next time: more reviews by Jim England, Chris Bailer, Ann Collier, Pascal Thomas, Judith Hanna, Kevin Rattan, Brian Smith, Sue Thomason, Paul Kincaid, Andy Sawyer and (as usual) me, with more to come from Absolutely Everybody (or so it seems). All will appear here....

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